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HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR METHODS OF STUDY

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Before we can modify the study-habits of high-school students it is first necessary to get from them some statement of their habits as they actually are. As a means of arriving at such a statement the questionnaire has been frequently used. The disadvantage of this method of investigation is that such questions must be, of necessity, leading questions. By careful questioning, a pupil can be led to discover that he has a whole category of study-habits which he uses or might use on some occasion or other. Conclusions based on such methods may give an entirely erroneous impression of the methods of study which are actually used from day to day.

Another method of investigation attempts to have the pupil describe the method by which he prepares a given assignment, and thus to have him reproduce, spontaneously and without taking his cue from anyone else, his methods of study in a specific instance. The obvious objection to this second method is that high-school pupils are not keen in their analyses of their own habits and mental processes. However, such descriptions do afford an insight into the more regularly established habits. By this method the process which is repeated from day to day is almost sure to be commented on by the pupil. More exceptional methods will probably not be mentioned. If a given pupil has habits of study sufficiently characteristic to differentiate him from others they will very likely appear.

Following this second method of investigation, all the pupils of the high school, which includes also, in part, pupils of the seventh and eighth grades, were given the following exercise for the same period in the day: "With your assignment for the next period before you, (1) Describe point by point the different things you will do in preparing it; (2) Give the general topic with which your assignment deals; (3) Grade; (4) Any special device which you

use. Prepare your lesson and see if you did less or more than you indicated and correct accordingly."

Although the programs of some of the pupils did not permit them to participate in the exercise, 166 manuscripts were received, an approximately equal number being from each grade.

At this particular period in the day the seventh grades were preparing a history assignment, the general topic of which was, "Growth toward Union in the Colonies"; the eighth grades were preparing a history assignment, the general topic being, "A Comparison of the Advantages of the North and the South in the Civil War"; the ninth grades were preparing an assignment in botany, the general topic being, "Some Conditions Influencing the Growth and Germination of Seeds"; the eleventh grades were preparing an assignment in mediaeval history, the general topic being, "Early Raids and Settlements of the Northmen"; the tenth grades were preparing an assignment in Roman history, the general topic of which was, "Social Classes in Republican Rome"; the twelfth grades were preparing an assignment in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the general topic being, "Prologue—Description of Pilgrims."

These manuscripts were then analyzed grade by grade and the results tabulated. These are given in the accompanying table. The numbers have been converted into percentages for convenience in comparison. A pupil was not given credit for using a particular method unless he mentioned it definitely. Thus many who said, "I study it first," were not given credit for having read the assignment once, although such a statement might be so interpreted. A sample reading of the table would be: "Of the seventh grade 91 per cent read the assignment once, 74 per cent use dictionaries, 71 per cent use maps, 5 per cent re-read," etc.

A few of the facts of this table are worth noticing. First, the percentage of those who know the general topic with which the lesson deals decreases from grade to grade as we go from the seventh to the twelfth. This may be due to a difficulty inherent in the method of treating the subject-matter of the text, the more complex interrelations of the advanced subject-matter having obscured its relation to the general topic, or, more probably, the high-school teachers have exercised less care in making their assignments and have failed to indicate the bearing of the specific subject-matter

upon the general topic with which it deals. At any rate, there is room for high-school teachers to improve in definiteness of assignment. Many assignments are poorly prepared because the pupil has no perspective adequate for its interpretation.

METHODS AND PERCENTAGE USING EACH BY GRADES

	Subject, History	Subject, History	Subject, Botany	Subject, Roman History	Subject, Medieval History	Subject, English
Year—B and A sections combined.	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Percentage knowing the general topic. . .	88	82	72	71	70	23
Percentage of each grade using the following methods:						
1. Read once.	91	86	81	71	90	77
2. Use dictionary.	74	24	9	38	20	19
3. Use maps.	71	14	.....	42	15	.....
4. Re-read once or more.	5	45	9	37	40	46
5. Ask themselves questions and attempt to answer.	37	.....	25	42	25	.....
6. Repeat off book.	37	17	.....	8	.....	.....
7. Use additional reference.	20	55	22	12	55	.....
8. Outline.	3	.....	3	.....	.....	11
9. Tell story in own words.	9	10	.....	12	.....	14
10. Use comparison and contrast.	23	3	.....	.....	5	.....
11. Exercise judgment in the choice of sub-topics.	11	41	.....	16	45	11
12. Merely recognize that there are points or sub-topics.	20	34	6	21	35	.....
13. Write out notes. . . . .	.....	3	25	8	20	7
14. Use glossary. . . . .	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	61
15. Translate. . . . .	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	11
16. Memorize dates.	14	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
17. Find the paragraph which gives answers to questions. . . . .	.....	24	.....	.....	.....	.....
18. Underscore words. . . . .	.....	.....	.....	12	15	7
19. Look up references in footnotes. . . . .	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	23
20. Group events about dates.	3	3	.....	.....	.....	.....

Another point worth noting is that in the two beginning history classes, namely, the seventh grade which is studying American history for the first time and the tenth grade which is beginning high-school history for the first time, classes in which the teachers had spent much drill in the use of maps, dictionaries, questions to themselves, and such aids, the percentage which was using such methods was relatively high. Again, in the seventh grade, where the teacher had been emphasizing comparison and contrast as a

method of study, the percentage using that device was very considerable, while it was scarcely mentioned by other classes. This would seem to point to the conclusion that teachers can modify the study-habits of children by conscious attention to methods and devices. This phase of the question will be made a matter of subsequent investigation, to which the present investigation is preliminary. It is to be further noted that the percentage of pupils in the eleventh grade using the devices mentioned above is very much lower than that of the tenth grade, although when the former class began its high-school history it was drilled quite as thoroughly in the use of such methods as the present tenth-year class is being drilled. This would seem to indicate that these habits, although used at one time, do not continue, unless made the subject of persistent and conscious effort on the part of the teacher. The intermittent attention to any given method on the part of teacher and pupils, with the exhortation on the part of the teacher to use such methods constantly in study, is not sufficient. The teacher must see to it that such methods are used constantly until they become as regularly established as preparation itself.

This conclusion is yet further emphasized by the relatively high percentage of those who exercised judgments in the choice of sub-topics in the eighth and eleventh grades, where that particular method of study had been made a matter of some deliberate endeavor on the part of the teachers.

The descriptions vary widely. Some pupils describe their methods very definitely, while others give very meager and general descriptions. The following is one of the best descriptions of methods of study in history. It is given by a pupil, age twelve, in Grade 7A. It has certain unusual features, also.

1. "Read lesson over."
2. "Read about it in other books."
3. "Look up words I do not understand."
4. "Then I make outline of paragraphs and look up each topic."

SPECIAL DEVICES

1. "I put myself in the place of one of the characters in the lesson."
2. "I shut my eyes and think of it as a picture, one scene at a time."
3. "Sometimes in battles, I read the battle over, then draw a plan of the battle."

4. "I locate in the geography places mentioned."

The following is a meager description by a pupil, age thirteen, Grade 8A:

1. "I would read the lesson over first."
2. "I would read it over again to see if I had it right in my mind."

The following is a description by an excellent Grade 10A student of her method in preparing a Roman history lesson:

1. "I read each separate paragraph and get the main points."
2. "I discuss to myself freely the main points and their relation to other parts."
3. "I read it all over again to be sure I have not missed a single point."
4. "If I come to a word I don't understand, I look it up."
5. "Locate in the atlas every city and country mentioned."

A boy in Grade 12A reports thus:

"I just hop to it until I get my lesson."

He is a very poor student, having been in high school four years, and is yet a year from graduation.

A girl in Grade 12A who is an excellent student, having done four years' work in three and a half years, reports thus with regard to a domestic science assignment:

"First I read each topic carefully. I then choose the most important points and write them in the form of an outline. I treat each topic in the same manner, and when I have finished reading the lesson I have a very good outline to which I may refer whenever I need it. I generally place the outline in my domestic science notebook and look over my notes just before the recitation."

Some special devices, each of which was mentioned by only one person and consequently not included in the table, are reported. Examples are:

"I try to connect the names of men with places on the map."

"I write down all dates and events which happened at that time beside them."

"I use a rhyme for remembering dates, which I make up myself."

"I use sums of money for important dates. I think of myself as having that many dollars."

In the Middle English of Chaucer the usual devices of translation are resorted to, writing their meaning above the words of the text, rearranging words to bring out the meaning better, in addition to the more common practices of using the glossary and foot-notes, and striving for fluency by repeated readings.